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ABSTRACT

A guide presents information for identifying helpful resources related to facility design for early childhood programs and materials exploring some of the critical issues involved in design decisions, particularly as they pertain to young children's learning and play environments. Included are tips for planning safe educational environments and for providing an indoor and outdoor physical environment that fosters optimal growth and development through opportunities for exploration and learning. The document concludes with an article on how to improve school playgrounds and a playground improvement rating scale to determine how well a playground meets certain goals. (GR)

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ED 460 605

Facility Design

for Early Childhood Programs

An NAEYC Resource Guide

M. M. Smith

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Facility Design for Early Childhood Programs

An NAEYC Resource Guide

Prepared by the NAEYC Information Service
March 1989

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a nonprofit membership organization representing more than 65,000 early childhood educators, policymakers, researchers, and parents. Dedicated to improving the quality of services provided to young children and their families, the Association strives to promote the professional development of those who work with young children and to increase public understanding and support for high quality early childhood programs.

About this Guide . . .

This Guide is designed as a reference to help you identify resources related to facility design for early childhood programs. These materials provide an overview to some of the critical issues involved in design decisions, particularly as they pertain to young children's learning and play environments. This compilation does not constitute an endorsement of any individual, organization, or resource identified. Listings are presented in alphabetical order with no implication of preference or recommendation. Some individuals and organizations may require payment for services that go beyond a simple information request.

About this Topic . . .

Growing numbers of young children, increased labor force participation by mothers of young children, and heightened recognition of the value of early childhood education have all combined to create an unprecedented demand for early childhood programs and facilities. Increasing numbers of residential homes are being modified to accommodate the activities of the additional children who spend major portions of their day in these settings. Existing nonresidential buildings are being renovated or space redesigned with the needs of young children in mind. New buildings are being constructed specifically for the purpose of facilitating young children's learning and growth.

The importance of physical design in the construction and renovation of early childhood facilities is slowly being recognized. Factors such as the location within the community and the layout and design of the building and outdoor play areas can either contribute to the children's learning experiences or hinder program quality by constraining the children and the staff. The amount of space—whether too little or too much—can also affect the children's and teachers' behavior. And, the quality of the connections between outdoor and indoor spaces is also important.

Elizabeth Prescott, a recently retired, leading authority on environments for young children, has said that an information gap often exists between environmental designers and teachers of young children. Those who understand principles of design often have little knowledge of child development; those who know children best are seldom designers. And, people who understand both the language of physical design and development of children are rare. Still, the information gap is not unbridgeable. Bridging the gap requires focusing on the key feature of designing for children—the need for flexibility. Both indoor and outdoor spaces, as well as the objects within these spaces, should be flexible enough to allow for modification by teachers as well as children.

The importance of flexibility is highlighted best by the knowledge of how children learn—through active interaction with the world around them. When children's environments are rigid and static, too many opportunities for experimentation and seeing the results of these experiments are lost. Children's environments should be viewed as a setting for growth—a setting they can manipulate and change in response to their changing developmental needs. When making *any* design decision, it is critical to think always of the effect of the decision on the entire space. Think of the program's entire site—the indoor area plus outdoor space—as a total unit, with the outdoor area as an extension of the indoor area, and vice versa. Because children respond to their total perceived environment, it is also important to understand the relationship between the contents and the surrounding empty space in any given arrangement. These realizations help you make appropriate design decisions for child care settings where Jim Greenman suggests "childhoods are being spent and child-rearing is shared."

An element not to be overlooked in designing spaces for young children is the extent to which the overall arrangement helps or hinders staff in carrying out their responsibilities. Paula Jorde-Bloom identifies the physical setting as a dimension of the overall organizational climate that contributes to staff being able to better meet the developmental needs of children. Another dimension to consider in designing facilities for young children is that of risk management, a component of both overall program quality and assessment of potential liability risk. A copy of "Day Care Centers: Self-Evaluations for Loss Control" (prepared by CIGNA Property & Casualty Insurance Companies) is included in this Guide.

Things to Consider

Individuals contemplating constructing or renovating early childhood facilities should have a solid grasp of state and local licensing and regulatory requirements that may affect their design plans, including each of the following. Anyone contemplating early childhood facility design decisions should first contact the state licensing office for information or requirements applying to your program.

Square Footage Requirements

Indoor space - Most states require allotments of 35 square feet per child of primary, usable activity indoor space. The Accreditation Criteria of the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, a division of NAEYC (Bredekamp, 1986) also cite this figure as a recommended minimum amount. More space than the minimum is preferred, generally between 40 and 50 square feet per child. Studies done by Elizabeth Prescott and colleagues at Pacific Oaks indicate both too much and too little space may be detrimental, particularly if not properly arranged. Crowded conditions may lead to more aggressive behavior, while too much space often leads to random, undirected behavior.

When planning the amount of space, the key word is *usable*. The smaller the group size, the more space necessary per child, because the basic space consuming furnishings required in the room are not dependent on a precise number of children. An infant room with six or ten babies is likely to need some of the same furnishings—changing table, couch and so on. The number of staff present in the room, whether the program is learning center based, and the encouraged presence of parents also affects the minimum amount of space necessary. If you begin planning based on 35 square feet per child, the end result in space for children is considerably less than the recommended amount.

Outdoor space - Most states and the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs stipulate a *minimum* of 75 square feet of outdoor play area per child. The Child Welfare League (1984) recommends 200 square feet per child as desirable. In practical terms, this results in an area of 3000 square feet (or a lot equivalent to 50 by 60 feet) available for a group of 15 children.

Group Size

Because space requirements are calculated on a per-child basis, the number of children in the group or classroom has important implications for facility design. The group sizes recommended by NAEYC's Academy (Bredekamp, 1986) vary by the age of the child and the number of staff in the group, and range from six to eight children for infants to 20 to 24 children for school-age children with at least two adults present at all times. Space originally designed for groups of children exceeding these recommendations may prove difficult to arrange for smaller groups.

Zoning, Fire, Building, Health and Safety Codes

Local municipalities enforce a range of environmental safety codes that may impact design decisions. Local officials should be contacted for specific information.

On the following pages, you will find contact information for a sampling of individuals and organizations that focus on particular aspects of designing facilities for young children, including environmental psychology, educational environments, children's play, and playgrounds. A listing of current resources for future reference is also included. Orders should be placed with the publisher listed next to each title. Any title listed in this Guide that is published by NAEYC should be ordered from:

NAEYC
1834 Connecticut Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20009
202-232-8777

Orders under $20 must be prepaid.

Individuals

Joe Frost
244 Education Building
Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Texas
Austin, TX 78712
512-471-4089

Areas of expertise: children's play; playground environments and equipment; child development; curriculum development; teacher education.

Jim Greenman
3854 Elliot Avenue So.
Minneapolis, MN 55407
612-823-5321

Areas of expertise: program and facility design, renovation, and adaptation; infant and toddler environments; evaluating children's environments.

Roger Hart
Children's Environments Research Group
Center for Human Environments and
Environmental Psychology Program
City University of New York
33 W. 42nd Street
New York, NY 10036
212-642-2969

Areas of expertise: environmental psychology; children's perceptions and use of the physical environment; evaluation of existing play areas; particular expertise in designing environments for children who have special physical, intellectual, social, or emotional characteristics.

Paul Hogan
Playground Clearinghouse
36 Sycamore Lane
Phoenixville, PA 19460
215-935-1549

Areas of expertise: playground planning and building; play; playground safety. Comprehensive information packet available for $5 prepaid.

Elizabeth Jones
Pacific Oaks College
5 Westmoreland Place
Pasadena, CA 91103
818-397-1300

Area of expertise: planning educational environments; effects of classroom design on children and teachers; teacher education.

Richard Katz
Richard Katz and Associates
1103 Westgate, Suite 304
Oak Park, IL 60301
312-524-1000

Areas of expertise: design of Holmes School Playground for All Children (Oak Park, IL) where disabled children have the opportunity to enjoy playground activities side by side with their able-bodied peers; development of this project as a prototype model.

Lisa Lindberg
Design Consultant, Children's Environments
8807 Bradford Road
Silver Spring, MD 20901
301-495-7398

Areas of expertise: evaluation of existing space and curriculum; design of developmentally appropriate environments; also works with architects to renovate or construct facilities.

Gary T. Moore
Professor of Architecture
and Director
Center for Architecture and Urban Planning Research
School of Architecture and Urban Planning
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Box 413
Milwaukee, WI 53201
414-229-6165

Areas of expertise: child care facilities; playgrounds; children's recreation areas; research relating child development theory to the physical environment; development of specific guidelines for designing indoor and outdoor space.

Robin Moore
School of Design
North Carolina State University
Box 7701
Raleigh, NC 27695
919-737-2204

Areas of expertise: design education; research on children and the planning, design, and management of their environments.

Anita Rui Olds
Anita Olds and Associates
10 Saville Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
617-661-0324

Areas of expertise: planning, design, and implementation of infant/toddler, preschool, child care, recreational, museum, and health care environments for children.

Organizations

Center for Architecture and Urban Planning Research
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Box 413
Milwaukee, WI 53201

The Center published a 7-volume series (1979-1983) on the findings of the children's environment project, an ongoing endeavor to translate research on children's needs into specific guidelines for designing both indoor and outdoor space. Three volumes were revised and reprinted in 1985. Research and design guidance have continued through projects and grants. A publications list may be obtained by writing the Center.

Children's Environments Research Group
Center for Human Environments and Environmental Psychology Program
City University of New York
33 W. 42nd Street
New York, NY 10036
Contact: Roger Hart, director
212-642-2969

In addition to offering graduate courses in enviromental psychology, the Center also publishes *Children's Environments Quarterly*, a journal that includes theory, research, and practical applications concerning the relationships between children and the physical environment. Subscriptions to this journal may be obtained from the Center for $28 annually. Single back issues focusing on specific aspects of children's environments are also available at $10 each.

Candian Housing Information Centre
Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation National Office
682 Montreal Road
Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1A 0I7

While this advisory service is not actively producing new materials, many of its existing booklets are extremely useful, including *Play Spaces for Preschoolers*, *Children's Play Spaces on Roof Decks*, and *Out of the Cellar and Into the Parlour: Guidelines for the Adaptation of Residential Spaces for Young Children*. Write for a catalogue to determine which booklets are currently available.

Committee on Architecture for Education
American Institute of Architects (AIA)
1735 New York Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20006
Contact: Christopher J. Gribbs
202-626-7589

The AIA is a professional association of architects. The Committee is a national group of architects working to advocate good design in the learning process. Concentrating on issues related to the planning, design, and construction of educational facilities and cultural spaces, the group provides technical assistance to architects and offers reports and audiovisual materials on the trends and values of good design.

Council of Educational Facility Planners, Intl.
1060 Carmack Road, Suite 160
Columbus, OH 43210
Contact: Tony Wall, executive director
614-292-1521

This group is a professional association with primary emphasis on the planning of educational facilities, although it is also involved in activities related to equipping, maintaining, and financing school facilities. Its members include private practice designers, consultants, architects, school administrators, planners, and producers of goods and services for educational facilities. The Council may be contacted for listings of designers and consultants.

International Playground Association (IPA/USA)
American Association for the Child's Right to Play
Contact: Tom Jambor
University of Alabama at Birmingham
School of Education
Birmingham, AL 35294
205-934-5371

An interdisciplinary, private organization founded in Denmark in 1961, this group provides an international forum and advocacy for the promotion of play opportunities. They also organize regional and national conferences, workshops, symposia, and study tours, and sponsor a triennial World Congress. In addition, IPA/USA publishes a newsletter and numerous publications and audiovisual materials on various aspects of play.

PLAE, Inc.
(Play and Learning in Adaptable Environments)
1802 Fifth Street
Berkeley, CA 94710
Contact: Susan Goltsman, director
415-845-7523

This nonprofit organization grew out of Robin Moore's Environmental Yard project in Berkeley, California. In September, 1986 they sponsored a national conference on play which was directed toward establishing national guidelines for play environments that promote integration of able-bodied and disabled children. They also work with manufacturers of play equipment to ensure the design of play equipment that may be used by all children. They publish a newsletter, "Play for All News" available at $25 for 4 issues.

Resources

Accreditation Criteria and Procedures of the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, edited by Sue Bredekamp, (1986). The accreditation guidelines address all components of an early childhood program, including the physical environment. The Criteria specifically related to physical environment are reprinted in this Guide. The complete booklet is available from NAEYC. Request NAEYC #920. Cost: $6 prepaid.

Assessment of Child Rearing Environments: An Ecological Approach, by Elizabeth Prescott, Elizabeth Jones, Sybil Kritchevsky, Cynthia Milich, & Ede Haselhoe, (1975). This report includes two parts: "Who Thrives in Group Day Care?" and "An Environmental Inventory." It is one in a series of empirical studies by Prescott and her colleagues assessing the effects of different methods of organizing classroom environments on children's behavior and development. Available from Pacific Oaks College, 5 West Moreland Place, Pasadena, CA 91103, 818-397-1300.

Caring Spaces: Learning Places, by Jim Greenman, (1987). A complete guide to designing child care environments where children are stimulated in their play, where they are invited to learn, and where all their developmental needs are met. Available from Exchange Press, P.O. Box 2890, Redmond, WA 98073, 206-883-9394. Cost: $29.

Child Welfare League of America Standards for Day Care Service, revised edition, Child Welfare League of America, (1984). These standards are a part of the broader set of standards that apply to all child welfare services. Chapter 9 of this booklet, "Building and Equipment of the Day Care Center," offers specific guidelines for facility planning, including sections on sanitation, building structure and safety, room and equipment arrangement, and the outdoor play area. Available from Child Welfare League of America, c/o CSSC, 300 Raritan Center Parkway, Edison, NJ 08818; request stock #2376. Cost: $12.50.

Childhood's Domain, by Robin Moore, (1986). Although this book is written focusing on children between the ages 8 and 12, it provides useful insight as to how children really feel about the places where they play. Children are queried concerning their favorite outdoor activities, providing "expert" evidence as to the importance of nooks and crannies for children's play environments. Available from MIG Communications, 1802 Fifth Street, Berkeley, CA 94710, 415-845-7549.

Children's Play and Playgrounds, by Joe Frost and Barry Klein, (1983). This book gives a good overview of the purpose of play and its benefits for children and provides useful guidelines for designing outdoor areas to maximize the value of play in children's growth and development. Available from Playgrounds International, P.0. Box 33363, Austin, TX 78764. Cost: $17.95.

The Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood, by Diane Trister Dodge, (1988). The Creative Curriculum is an environmentally based, comprehensive curriculum. It provides teachers with the framework to organize a program that supports their role and children's learning. The curriculum is available as an illustrated book with eight modules or as a 37-minute video tape. Both are available from Teaching Strategies, Inc., P.O. Box 42243, Washington, DC 20015, 202-362-7543. Cost: The book is $39.95 and the video is $99.50 plus postage and handling.

"Down the Rabbit Hole: A Special Environment for Preschool Learning," by David F. Gibson, *Landscape Architecture,* (May 1978, vol. 68, no. 3, pp. 211-216). This article describes the Wildwood Preschool in Aspen, Colorado, designed by biologist-inventor-designer Robert Lewis and located in a natural landform berm in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. The article's title refers to the fact that the children enter the program facility through "pockets in the turf" resembling rabbit holes.

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, by Thelma Harms and Richard Clifford, (1980). This scale provides a useful tool for assessing the rooms and groupings within an early childhood setting and determining needed improvements. Available from Teachers College Press, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027, 212-678-3929. Cost: $7.95 plus $1.75 postage and handling.

Environments for Young Children: A Discussion with Elizabeth Prescott and Elizabeth Jones. This 17-minute video (1/2 inch VHS format) provides a useful overview of the ways in which classroom arrangement and materials can help you meet your goals for children. Available from NAEYC. Request NAEYC #806. Cost: $39.

The Family Day Care Rating Scale, by Thelma Harms and Richard M. Clifford, (1988). An assessment tool designed to give an overall picture of the quality of care provided to children in family day homes. This scale is a version of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale. Available from Teachers College Press, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027, 212-678-3929.

A Great Place to Work: Improving Conditions for Staff in Young Children's Programs, by Paula Jorde-Bloom, (1988). This booklet discusses the kinds of environments that are conducive to professional and personal fulfillment for adults who work with young children. Available from NAEYC. Request NAEYC #250. Cost: $5 prepaid.

Housing as if People Mattered: Site Design Guidelines for Medium Density Family Housing, by Clare Cooper and Wendy Sarkissian, (1986). Cooper is a noted expert on planning housing areas that provide play space for children without disturbing other residents. The book is particularly useful for designing residential homes for family day care. Available from University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720, 415-642-4247. Cost: $17.95 plus $1.50 postage and handling.

"How Can Playgrounds Be Improved? A Rating Scale," by Penny Lovell and Thelma Harms, *Young Children*, (vol. 40, no. 3, March 1985). Complementing Harms and her colleagues' work on indoor environmental ratings, this scale is an easy-to-use assessment tool for early childhood program play areas. (Reprint enclosed.)

The Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale, by Thelma Harms, Debby Cryer, and Richard M. Clifford, (1988). An assessment tool designed to give an overall picture of the quality of group care for children up to 30 months of age. The ITERS consists of 33 items in seven categories: furnishings and display, in seven personal care routines, language and reasoning, learning activities, interaction, program structure, and adult needs. Available from Teachers College Press, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027, 212-678-3929.

Learning Centers for Young Children: To be Built in Classrooms and Other Places Where Children Gather to Learn, (3rd edition) by Georgia Houle, (1987) . This book shows how to create various activity areas. It also provides a list of the educational values for each activity area, along with a description of the materials and structural items needed to create the setting. Available from Tot-Lot Child Care Products, R.R. 2, Weaver Hill Road, Box 1486, West Greenwich, RI 02816, 401-397-9838. Cost: $15 plus $1.50 postage and handling.

The Learning Environment: An Instructional Strategy, by Katherine Loughlin and Joseph Suina, (1982). This book describes how to organize classroom space for children from infancy through school-age. Also discusses organizing space for special purposes. Available from Teachers College Press, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue New York, NY 10027, 212-678-3929. Cost: $16.95 plus $1.75 shipping and handling.

Learning Environments for Children: A Developmental Approach to Shaping Activity Areas, by Henry Sanoff and Joan Sanoff, (1988). This book is oriented specifically for early childhood program staff. It stresses the interrelated nature of the program goals for children's development and the physical environment. Available from Humanics, Ltd., P.O. Box 7447, Atlanta, GA 30309. Cost: $12.95 plus $3 postage and handling.

Let's Play Outdoors, by Katherine Read Baker, (1966). This classic NAEYC publication describes characteristics of good outdoor play areas and equipment, and provides helpful tips on ways teachers can facilitate outdoor play. Available from NAEYC. Request NAEYC #101. Cost: $2.50 prepaid.

Living in the Real World, by Jim Greenman. This column on environmental issues is a regular feature in *Child Care Information Exchange*, a bimonthly magazine written for early childhood program directors. Subscriptions available from Child Care Information Exchange, P.O. Box 2890, Redmond, WA 98073, 206-883-9394. Cost: $35 per year.

The Most Enabling Environment: Education for All Children, Association for Childhood Education International, (1979). This booklet presents various views on Public Law 94-142, which mandates open facilities and programs for children with special needs. It discusses ways to make programs accessible to all students, regardless of physical impairments. Available from ACEI, 11141 Georgia Avenue, Suite 200, Wheaton, MD 20902, 301-942-2442. Cost: $5.20 ($4 for ACEI members) plus postage and handling.

"The Physical Setting in Day Care," by Elizabeth Prescott, in *Making Day Care Better: Training, Evaluation, and the Process of Change*, edited by James T. Greenman and Robert W. Fuqua, (1984). This article highlights key concepts related to the spatial organization of the early childhood classroom and activity settings within the classroom, and discusses links between the program format and its environment. The book is available from Teachers College Press, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027, 212-678-3929.

Places and Spaces for Preschool and Primary (INDOORS), by Jeanne Vergeront, (1987). This hand-lettered book has sketches and patterns for make-them-yourself activity clusters and storage-on-the-go ideas. Available from NAEYC. Request NAEYC #310. Cost: $2.50 prepaid.

Places and Spaces for Preschool and Primary (OUTDOORS), by Jeanne Vergeront, (1988). This hand-lettered booklet is loaded with sketches and suggestions for designing play structures for maximum safety, efficiency, and enjoyment. Available from NAEYC. Request NAEYC #311. Cost: $3 prepaid.

Planning Environments for Young Children: Physical Space, by Sybil Kritchevsky and Elizabeth Prescott with Lee Walling, (1977). This classic volume discusses the best ways to plan classroom space, to define areas and avoid traffic jams, and to structure outdoor space into activity areas to avoid aimless wandering by the children. Available from NAEYC. Request NAEYC #115. Cost: $2.50 prepaid.

Planning for Play, by Lady Allen of Hurtwood, (1969). A classic volume by one of the earliest and most respected advocates for children's play, highlights specific playgrounds and makes recommendations for planning the best settings for encouraging children to explore and manipulate their environment. Available from MIT Press, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, MA 02142, 617-253-5646. Cost: $9.95 plus $1.50 postage and handling.

Play For All Guidelines: Planning, Design and Management of Outdoor Play Environments for All Children, by Robin C. Moore, Susan M. Goltsman, and Daniel S. Iachofano (1987). The Play For All Guidelines expand the scope of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Guidelines by evaluating each guideline against a standard management checklist that includes play value, programming, play leadership, accessibility and integration, and safety and risk management. Available from MIG Communications, 1802 Fifth Street, Berkeley, CA 94710, 415-845-7549. Cost: $39.95 plus $3.50 postage and handling.

Playground Safety, by Joe Frost, (1988). This 58-minute video was prepared to assist licensing trainers with the Texas Department of Human Services. It identifies playground hazards to be avoided and/or eliminated, as well as elements that make playgrounds fit the developmental needs of young children. Available from Texas Department of Human Services, P.O. Box 2960, Austin, TX 78769. Cost: $25.

Recommendations for Child Care Centers and *Recommendations for Child Play Areas*. These design guides for planning and designing different types of child care facilities and outdoor play environments are illustrated with photographs and sketches. Available from the Center for Architecture and Urban Planning Research, P.O. Box 413, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 53201. Cost: $20 for each set of recommendations.

"Relations Between Physical Setting and Adult/Child Behavior in Day Care," by Elizabeth Prescott, in *Advances in Early Education and Day Care*, volume 2, edited by Sally Kilmer, (1981, pp. 129-158). This article examines variables used to describe the physical setting—density, play equipment, and organization of space—and presents data on the relationships between these variables and adult/child behavior. The volume is available from JAI Press, 55 Old Post Road, Greenwich, CT 06836-1678.

Room Arrangement as a Teaching Strategy, by Diane Trister Dodge, (1978). This 23-minute filmstrip and audio cassette is divided into two parts. The first part examines the effects of room arrangement and the display of materials on children's behavior. The second looks at how the physical environment can be organized to emphasize certain skills and concepts. The audio tape is also available in Spanish. Available from Teaching Strategies, Inc., P.O. Box 42243, Washington, DC 20015, 202-362-7543. Cost: $35 plus $4 postage and handling.

Spaces for Children: The Built Environment and Children's Development, edited by Thomas David and Carol Weinstein, (1987). This book is designed to focus attention on the relationships between children and the physical setting and to sensitize researchers to the need to examine the impact of the physical setting on developmental needs. The volume incorporates several perspectives on ways of thinking about the physical environment and includes four major sections: 1) the impact of the built environment on development; 2) practical applications of "how-to"; 3) user participation; and 4) perspectives on designing for children's development. Available from Plenum Press, 233 Spring Street, New York, NY 10013.

The Playground Safety Checker, by Paul Hogan, (1988). Based on the experience of a safety inspector for playgrounds, this checklist is a tool to identify the hundreds of different ways a child can be injured while playing at school, a neighborhood recreation site, or someone's backyard. Available from Playground Press, 36 Sycamore Lane, Phoenixville, PA 19460, 215-935-1549. Cost: $20.

When Children Play, edited by Joe Frost and Sylvia Sunderlin, (1985). This book presents proceedings of the International Conference on Play and Play Environments, held in Austin, Texas, in July 1983. It is divided into seven major sections: 1) understanding play; 2) play, learning and development; 3) how children use playgrounds; 4) trends in designing and developing playgrounds; 5) indoor play environments and play materials; 6) the role of adults in promoting play; and 7) an assessment tool. Available from ACEI, 11141 Georgia Avenue, Suite 200, Wheaton, MD 20902, 301-942-2442. Cost: $38.35 (non-members) plus $1 postage and handling.

Tips for Planning Safe Environments

Answer "yes" to these questions and make your environment safer for children and adults.

Sidewalks, Steps and Parking Areas

- Are all sidewalks, steps, ramps and parking areas in good condition and free of tripping hazards?
- Are sturdy handrails provided for steps and ramps and fastened securely?
- Is exterior lighting adequate at night over all walking and parking areas?
- Are all lights in working order?
- Are traffic control signs in place and easily read?
- During inclement weather:
    - Is there adequate supply of sand and salt to treat icy steps, walks, and the parking lot?
    - Do storm drains operate properly to prevent standing water in the parking lot?
    - Are all areas within the building adequately heated to prevent frozen pipes?

Playgrounds

- Has playground equipment been purchased, installed, and maintained with the children's safety in mind?
- Is equipment designed to prevent entrapment of any part of a child's body, head, or clothing?
- Is all playground equipment installed over shock-absorbing materials and securely anchored to the ground?
- Has any playground equipment installed over asphalt or concrete surfaces been removed?
- Is the equipment free of sharp points, edges and corners, pinch and crush points, protrusions, and projections?
- Is equipment checked daily for damage (splinters, loose parts, etc.)?
- Are procedures in place to repair and/or replace any faulty equipment?
- Have all children been instructed on playground safety and rules of behavior, with regular reminders of the consequences of roughhousing?
- Is the number of children playing on any one piece of equipment limited to prevent crowding, pushing, or accidental injuries?
- Are children always supervised by staff members trained in first aid and accident procedures?
- Is the playground checked daily for broken glass, stones, and sharp objects that may cause injury?

Exits

- Are exits:
    - Properly marked with lighted exit signs?
    - Unobstructed and readily accessible?
- Do all doors allow ready exit (not padlocked or chained shut)?
- Do all exit doors operate easily, open outward, and have panic hardware?
- Are fire escape handrails sturdy and well secured?
- Are fire doors kept closed (not held or blocked open)?
- Is emergency lighting tested regularly and kept in good repair?

Stairs, Doors, and Walking Surfaces

- Are carpeted areas in good condition with no tripping hazards?
- Are aisles and hallways clear and unobstructed?
- Are mats or other provisions available to control wet floors at entrances during inclement weather?
- Are stairs in good condition, with non-slippery surfaces on stair treads and secure handrails?
- Are all stairs and walking areas kept clear of toys, games, spills, or other slip/trip hazards?
- Do adults hold doors open for all children? (Doors can be heavy and children may forget to hold doors open for others.)

Classrooms

- Are toys and equipment checked frequently to make sure they are in good repair?
- Are broken toys removed or replaced?
- Is furniture regularly checked to make sure it is stable and in good repair?
- Are equipment, toys, and other classroom materials:
  - Designed and selected for the age group using them?
  - Free of toxic materials?
  - Designed to avoid unnecessary risks (i.e. round-ended scissors)?
- Are rooms kept free of clutter?
- Are children not permitted to:
  - Climb on furniture or shelves?
  - Throw toys or other objects?
  - Misuse equipment?

Heat, Light, and Power

- Has the heating system been cleaned and serviced by a competent heating contractor within the past 12 months?
- Has the air conditioning system been cleaned and serviced within past 12 months?
- Has the electrical system been checked by a licensed electrician within past 12 months?
- Are electrical, heating, and air conditioning rooms restricted only to authorized personnel and kept free of combustible storage?
- Are electrical panels readily accessible?
- Are electrical panel doors kept closed?
- Are circuit breakers free to operate with none taped open or otherwise obstructed, and circuits clearly labeled?
- Are there signs of frequent fuse replacement or re-setting of circuit breakers, indicating an overload of circuits?
- Are all electrical equipment and appliances properly grounded?
- Are *all* electrical outlets covered?
- Are all electrical cords in good condition and placed out of the reach of children?

Kitchens

- Are kitchen doors kept closed and children's access to the kitchen limited?
- Are children closely supervised when allowed into the kitchen area?
- Are kitchen and cooking appliances safely arranged and well maintained?
- Is at least one multi-purpose type (ABC) fire extinguisher located in an exit path from the cooking area?
- Is there adequate supervision of cooking, baking, and mealtime activities to prevent accidents or choking on food while eating?

- Are cooking equipment and the stove exhaust hood and filters free of grease accumulation?
- Have the cooking equipment, exhaust hood, and ducts been cleaned by an independent contractor within past 6 months?
- Are kitchen floors slip-resistant and free from tripping hazards, and food spills?
- Are good sanitary practices regularly maintained?
- Are all foods labeled with freshness dates to prevent food poisoning?
- Are all chemicals and cleaners isolated from food processing/storage areas and out of children's reach?

Emergency Planning

- Are all new employees given orientation on safety and emergency procedures?
- Are all employees instructed/trained as to duties and responsibilities in the event of fire or other emergency?
- Are fire drills and evacuation procedures practiced at least monthly?
- Is there at least one person who is adequately trained in first aid readily available while the center is in operation?
- Are first aid supplies adequately maintained and kept in good condition?
- Are emergency numbers conspicuously posted for the:
    - Fire department?
    - Police department?
    - Poison center?
    - Physician(s)?
    - Ambulance?
    - Hospital(s)?
- Are emergency plans, including plans for vehicle failure, documented and reviewed prior to any excursion?

Motor Vehicle Safety

- Do driver selection standards include:
    - Checking the motor vehicle record of drivers?
    - Verifying application information with past employers?
    - Checking the age and experience of drivers?
    - Giving a road test to evaluate the driver's abilities to park, back-up, and operate the vehicle be driven?
- Does training for vehicle operators include instructions to:
    - Slow down at intersections and cross check traffic?
    - Check around vehicle before backing up?
    - Never tailgate, and to follow at a safe distance?
    - Use turn signals to provide ample warning of lane changes, turns, and stops?
- Are vehicles inspected and maintained under a formal, written program?
- Do all students have a written permission agreement signed by their parents or guardian for field trips on file?
- Are all infants and toddlers seated in approved child restraint seats before transporting?
- Do at least *two* trained supervisors accompany the transportation of all students?
- Are children *never* left unattended in vehicles?
- Are keys never left in the ignition?
- Is extra care used in the loading and unloading of children to prevent pinching fingers in doors?
- Are first aid kits kept in the vehicle at all times (especially on field trips)?
- Are operating and emergency procedures implemented and strictly enforced for all vehicle operations?

Fire Protection

- Are fire extinguishers:
  - Serviced annually and tagged with date serviced?
  - Readily accessible?
  - All in designated locations and ready for use?
- Has the sprinkler system been inspected and tested by a qualified sprinkler contractor within past 12 months?
- Have standpipe/fire hoses been properly positioned on racks and inspected within past 12 months?
- Are fire department and other emergency phone numbers posted at the switchboard and all telephones?
- Are smoke detectors U.L. listed and connected to building electrical system?
- Are smoke detectors installed at stairways and doors, and every 30 feet in corridors, lounges, kitchen, recreation, and sleeping areas.
- Are smoke detectors checked and tested monthly?

Burglary

- Are high value items (computers, TV's, VCR's) anchored in place or stored in a locked, secure area when not in use?
- Are all exterior doors and windows physically locked, secured and/or alarmed after closing to prevent intrusion?
- Is the building exterior well lit at night, with floodlighting in vulnerable areas?
- Are money collections/checks deposited daily?
- Are checks stamped FOR DEPOSIT ONLY when received?

The preceding information was adapted from materials prepared by the CIGNA Property and Casualty Insurance Companies. The CIGNA companies and their employees make no guarantee of your results and assume no liability in connection with either the information or the safety suggestions provided here. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that every safety procedure is contained herein or that circumstances may not warrant or require further or additional procedures.

G. Physical Environment

GOAL: The indoor and outdoor physical environment fosters optimal growth and development through opportunities for exploration and learning.

RATIONALE: The physical environment affects the behavior and development of the people, both children and adults, who live and work in it. The quality of the physical space and materials provided affects the level of involvement of the children and the quality of interaction between adults and children. The amount, arrangement, and use of space, both indoors and outdoors, are to be evaluated.

G-1. The indoor and outdoor environments are safe, clean, attractive, and spacious. There is a minimum of 35 square feet of usable playroom floor space indoors per child and a minimum of 75 square feet of play space outdoors per child.

Limited indoor space may be offset by sheltered outdoor space where climate permits reliance on outdoor space for activities often conducted indoors. Limited outdoor space may be offset by a greater amount of indoor space (such as a gym), which permits an equivalent activity program. Space requirements are stated as minimums. More space than the minimum is preferred, although too much space can be a problem if not properly arranged. The key word is *usable* — space that is used for permanent storage should not be measured when assessing amount of space.

The required amount of outdoor space is indicated by the number of children using the space at one time. Use of outdoor space should be scheduled to allow for enough space and also to prevent competition among age groups. Very young children should have separate time or space outdoors. Observation of interactions between children and involvement of children in activity are good indicators of whether sufficient space is available.

The environment should be attractive, colorful, and with children's work and other pictures displayed at children's eye level. The safety and cleanliness of the environment are addressed in the criteria for Health and Safety (Component **H**).

G-2. Activity areas are defined clearly by spatial arrangement. Space is arranged so that children can work individually, together in small groups, or in a large group. Space is arranged to provide clear pathways for children to move from one area to another and to minimize distractions.

The arrangement of space is as important as the amount. Children should be able to move freely from one activity to another without unduly disturbing others. Activity areas should be divided so that children in one area are not distracted by those in other areas. Well-organized space invites desired behaviors and facilitates positive interaction between people and active involvement with materials.

G-3. The space for toddler and preschool children is arranged to facilitate a variety of small group and/or individual activities including block building, sociodramatic play, art, music, science, math, manipulatives, and quiet book reading. Other activities such as sand/water play and woodworking are also available on occasion. Carpeted areas and ample crawling space are provided for nonwalkers. Sturdy furniture is provided so nonwalkers can pull themselves up or balance themselves while walking. School-age children are provided separate space arranged to facilitate a variety of age-appropriate activities.

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Private areas are available for children to have solitude.

This criterion refers to activities rather than areas of the room. For example, science and math are activities; they are not limited to parts of the room although the room should be arranged so that they do occur. Block building, sociodramatic play, and book reading are facilitated by separate areas. Art and cooking projects which are messy should be near a source of water. School-age children must have a separate space.

G-4. Age-appropriate materials and equipment of sufficient quantity, variety, and durability are readily accessible to children and arranged on low, open shelves to promote independent use by children.

Materials and equipment are evaluated on several levels. A variety of equipment is needed as well as appropriate kinds. All age groups need active play equipment, materials which stimulate the senses, construction materials, manipulative toys, dramatic play equipment, art materials, and books and records. References which suggest equipment in each of these categories for various age groups appear in Appendix A. Children are more likely to use materials constructively and creatively if materials are accessible to them, organized to promote independent use, and periodically changed to provide variety.

G-5. Individual spaces for children to hang their clothing and store their personal belongings are provided.

Personal storage space may be provided in a variety of ways, but children and adults should have individual spaces for storing personal belongings that are easily identified.

G-6. Private areas are available indoors and outdoors for children to have solitude.

Children who spend long periods of time in group settings need opportunities for privacy and solitude. Such provision can be made by environmental arrangement and planning, both indoors and outdoors. These areas should be easily supervised by adults. Privacy can be provided by using equipment such as tunnels and playhouses, or small enclosed spaces in room arrangement.

G-7. The environment includes soft elements such as rugs, cushions, or rocking chairs.

Softness can be provided in many ways — cozy furniture such as rockers and pillows; carpeting; grass outdoors; adult laps to cuddle on; and soft materials such as play dough, water, sand, and finger paint.

G-8. Sound-absorbing materials are used to cut down on excessive noise.

Noise is to be expected and even desired in environments for children. The purpose of this criterion is not to eliminate noise. Acoustical building materials, strategically placed carpets, and other similar sound-absorbing materials can be very effective in minimizing excessive noise and enhancing the quality of the living environment for both children and adults. Excessive environmental noise can be fatiguing and cause stress.

G-9. The outdoor area includes a variety of surfaces such as soil, sand, grass, hills, flat sections, and hard areas for wheel toys. The outdoor area includes shade; open space; digging space; and a variety of equipment for riding, climbing, balancing, and individual play. The outdoor area is protected from access to streets or other dangers.

Outdoor areas will vary depending on geographic location. This criterion emphasizes that a variety of types of surface and equipment be provided. While hills and shade are not always available, the environment can sometimes be supplemented with other materials. The outdoor area must be fenced or protected by natural barriers from streets and other dangerous areas. The criterion implies that an outdoor play space must be provided or arranged, such as pre-arranged use of neighboring community or school playground.

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How Can Playgrounds Be Improved?

A Rating Scale

Penny Lovell and Thelma Harms

What do children learn when they play outdoors? Swings, slides, and jungle gyms have been playground staples for generations of children to exercise and develop their motor skills. Outdoor play can contribute much more to children's development, however, when planned as an integral component of the total learning environment.

Although the expansion of motor skills remains an important goal, outdoor play spaces can also contribute to children's cognitive development, enhance communication and social skills, and give children both a sense of independence and positive self-image (David and Wright 1974; Prescott and David 1976). Since less cognitive and social play is exhibited on traditional playground equipment (Hayward, Rothenberg, and Beasley 1974), and playgrounds can add considerably to the size of the program budget, we need to plan ahead to design and equip playgrounds that reach their maximum play value for children.

What are playgrounds for?

As a result of interest by educators and designers, playground design has become much more creative. A limited budget need not be stretched to include expensive equipment that has limited value for children's total learning.

Instead, playgrounds now can incorporate stationary and moving sections with secluded places to sit and talk or play with dramatic props. They offer variety in size, shape, and directionality, providing different levels of challenge so that children can develop their capabilities without endangering themselves or others (Friedberg 1969; Prescott and David 1977; Hewes 1974). Social play is encouraged when equipment invites children to play together. For example, a tire mounted horizontally on chains becomes a group swing for four or five children, unlike traditional swings that are limited to solitary or parallel play.

Neither attractiveness nor innovative design ensure that a playground will play a key role in meeting the educational objectives for outdoor play that are the hallmark of a high quality program for young children. The first step toward playground improvement is to agree upon goals for children's learning. Teachers, administrators, and parents can plan outdoor play areas wisely if they consider these broad objectives for children's development:

- Equipment must be age-appropriate for children's large muscle development. Activities include balancing, throwing, lifting, climbing, pushing, pulling, crawling, skipping, swinging, and riding.
- The outdoor play area facilitates refinement of social skills. Playground design and choice of equipment encourage children to take turns, cooperate, share, and plan together.
- Children are challenged to solve problems outdoors using both physical and social skills. For example, children might lift heavy objects with a pulley or negotiate opportunities to use an especially popular area.
- The outdoor play area enhances understanding of concepts of relationships such as in/out, up/down, over/under, high/medium/low, heavy/light, hard/soft, and fast/slow.

Penny Lovell, MAT, is a play therapist at Duke University Medical Center, Durham, North Carolina.

Thelma Harms, Ph.D., is Director of Curriculum Development, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

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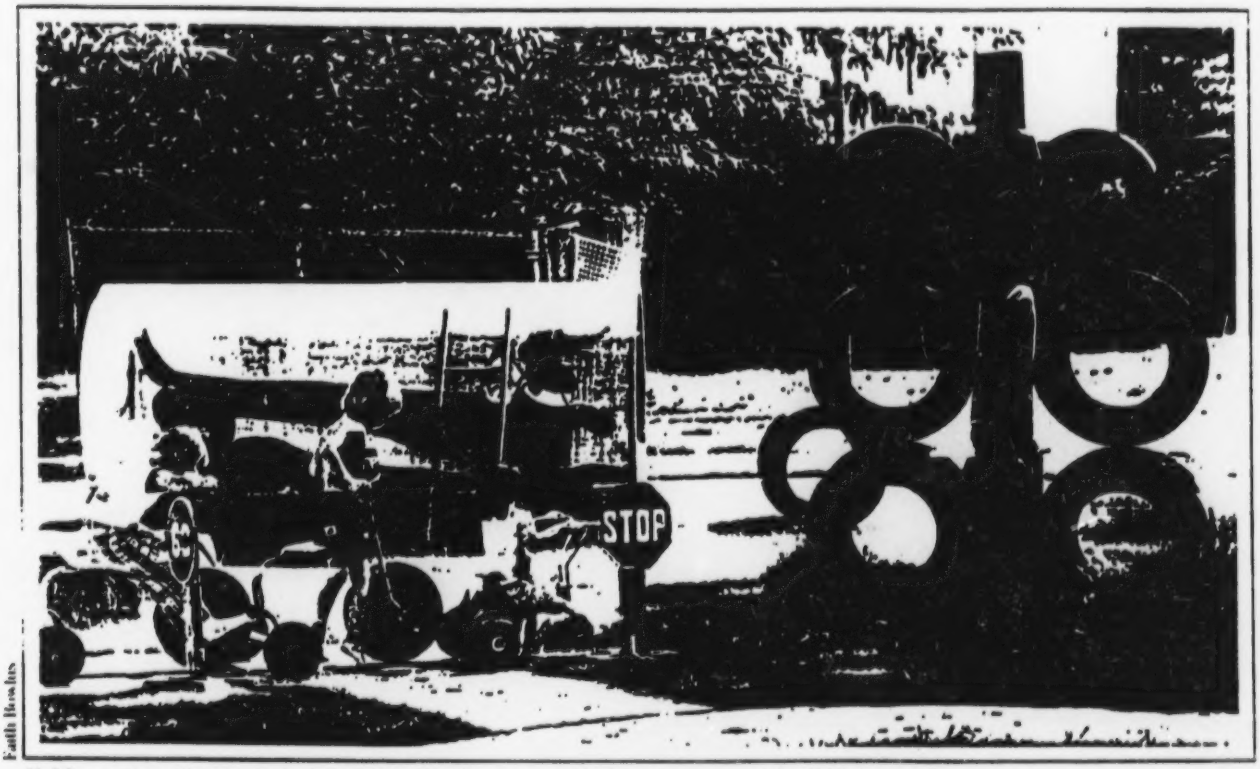

Faith Hooks

Neither attractiveness nor innovative design ensure that a playground is of high quality.

- Creativity is encouraged outdoors through art, carpentry, music, movement, and blockbuilding.
- Children advance their physical knowledge about the natural world through changes in the weather, planting and harvesting, caring for pets, balancing themselves or objects, observing relationships between distance and speed, and experimenting with volume and shape.
- Children grow in their understanding of the social world by recreating adult work roles in dramatic play such as firefighters, families, garages, and hospitals.
- Children see the outdoor environment as a comfortable setting in which to eat, paint, read, and engage in other activities.

Other goals for children may emerge as you study your facility with the rating scale provided here and as you consider the children in your group.

How valuable is your playground?

The second step in improving the value of any play area is to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. This rating scale will enable you to identify a variety of overlapping aspects of outdoor settings, some of which may be new ideas. Staff, parents, and administrators may each want to rate the playground so they have a clearer perception of how well the program's goals for children are being met in the playground.

After the evaluations have been completed and the results tabulated, a discussion will help everyone involved think more about what steps are necessary to change the outdoor area so it can contribute more toward reaching program goals.

What will change?

Can a minor change, such as the addition of a storage shed, make equipment more accessible? Will the daily schedule need to be revised to allow for more time outdoors? Can teachers spend more time interacting with children rather than supervising them?

Or will the expansion of the outdoor play environment become a priority? Will fundraising be necessary? How will the area be redesigned? How can the children continue to use the area when extensive renovations are taking place? How many years might it take to achieve the ideal outdoor area for the program?

This article provides a jumping-off place for playground improvement. With the help of the scale, parents and early

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childhood professionals can assess playgrounds from a broader perspective. Some of the resources in the bibliography document the research and rationale for innovative playgrounds, while others offer practical suggestions.

Creating better outdoor environments in early childhood programs is only the beginning of what can be achieved for playgrounds. Other groups can also benefit from our understanding about the value of outdoor play: public park agencies, elementary schools, teacher education programs, and apartment designers. By applying what we know about social, cognitive, and motor development, and by using this rating scale to assess play areas, we can provide children with the best possible outdoor play environments. Where will you begin to share what we know?

Resources for improving outdoor play environments

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Playground Improvement Rating Scale

Program _____

Number of children _____ Date _____

Ages of children _____ Rater _____

Number of staff _____

Score each item: 3—outdoor play area meets this goal very well
2—outdoor play area needs to be improved to meet this goal
1—little or no evidence that outdoor play area meets this goal

(*Examples* of items to look for are listed in parentheses.)

Activities and equipment

Range of activities

_____ 1. The equipment provides appropriate and stimulating levels of difficulty for all the age groups served. (infants, toddlers, preschool children, school-age children)

_____ 2. A variety of equipment is provided to stimulate different types of physical activity. (balls, balance beams, wheel toys, swings, climbing equipment, jump ropes, ladders, planks)

_____ 3. Some of the equipment and materials invite cooperative play. (outdoor blocks, rocking boat, dramatic play props)

_____ 4. Creative materials are readily available for children. (clay, carpentry, paints, water, and sand)

_____ 5. Some of the equipment is flexible so that it can be combined in different ways by the children with adult help if necessary. (planks, climbing boxes, ladders)

_____ 6. The climbing equipment incorporates a variety of spatial relationships. (through tunnels, up or down ramps, over or under platforms)

_____ 7. There is a suitable place for gardening. (window box, tubs with soil, garden plot)

_____ 8. There are enough options for the children to choose from without unreasonable competition or waiting.

Safety and health

_____ 9. The equipment is substantially constructed. (anchored climbing structures and swing frames)

_____ 10. Cushioning is provided under swings and climbing apparatus. (loose sand or tanbark at least 1 foot deep within a containing edgeboard, rubber padding)

_____ 11. Swing seats are made of pliable material.

_____ 12. Swings are separated from areas where children run or ride wheel toys.

_____ 13. Protective railings prevent children from falling from high equipment.

_____ 14. Equipment is well maintained. (no protruding nails, splinters, flaking paint, broken parts, frayed ropes)

_____ 15. The play area is routinely checked and maintained. (trash picked up, grass mowed, good drainage)

_____ 16. The health hazards from animal contamination are minimized. (sand box covers, fences, children wash hands after playing outdoors)

Organization of play area

_____ 17. The play area is well defined. (fence that cannot be climbed)

_____ 18. There are clear pathways and enough space between areas so that traffic flows well and equipment does not obstruct the movement of children.

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_____ 19. Space and equipment are organized so that children are readily visible and easily supervised by teachers.

_____ 20. Different types of activity areas are separated. (tricycle paths separate from swings, sand box separate from climbing area)

_____ 21. Open space is available for active play.

_____ 22. Some space encourages quiet, thoughtful play. (grassy area near trees, sandbox away from traffic)

_____ 23. Blocks and props can be set up outdoors for dramatic play.

_____ 24. Art activities can be set up outdoors.

_____ 25. The area is easily accessible from the classroom.

_____ 26. The area is readily accessible to the restrooms.

_____ 27. A drinking fountain is available.

_____ 28. Accessible and sufficient storage is provided.

_____ 29. A portion of the play area is covered for use in wet weather.

_____ 30. An adequate area is sunny in cold weather.

_____ 31. An adequate area of shade is provided in hot weather.

Variety of play surfaces

_____ 32. A hard surface is available to ride wheel toys, play group games, or dance.

_____ 33. Soil, sand, and water are available for digging and mud play.

_____ 34. A grassy or carpeted area is provided.

_____ 35. Good drainage keeps all surfaces usable.

Surrounding environment

_____ 36. The fence creates an effective screen for the playground by blocking out unpleasant or by admitting pleasant aspects of the surrounding environment. It protects children from intrusion by passers-by.

_____ 37. The setting visible from the play area is pleasant.

_____ 38. The location is relatively quiet. (little noise from railroads, traffic, factories)

Supervision and use of play area

_____ 39. A sufficient number of adults supervise the children during outdoor play.

_____ 40. Responsibility for specific areas is assigned to staff to assure that the entire playground is well supervised.

_____ 41. Teachers focus their attention on and interact with the children to enhance learning and maintain safety. (adults do not talk together at length or sit passively when supervising children)

_____ 42. Children are guided to use the equipment appropriately. (climb on ladders instead of tables)

_____ 43. The daily schedule includes morning and afternoon active play periods for all age groups, either outdoors or in suitably equipped indoor areas.

_____ 44. The schedule for use of the play area minimizes overlap of age groups to avoid conflicts, overcrowding, and undue competition for materials.

_____ 45. Special activities are planned for and set up in the outdoor area daily. (games, painting)

_____ 46. Teachers add to or rearrange large equipment at least every six months. (spools, crates, tunnels)

_____ 47. Teachers encourage and assist children in rearranging small flexible equipment. (ladders, planks, boxes)

_____ 48. Most of the children are constructively involved with the equipment and activities in the playground.

_____ 49. Children help clean up the area and put away equipment.

_____ **Total score**

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